

# COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.  
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. III. No. 5

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, APRIL 10, 2009

PRICE: FREE

## The Hole Part 1

Victor A. Walsh

District Historian

San Diego Coast District

Not too long ago Robert Robinson, the district civil engineer, asked me to walk over to the Cosmopolitan Hotel to look at a hole in the adobe end wall facing Juan Street. We walked up the stairway to the second story and down the balcony to the end room. A cacophony of sounds—crowbars prying off lath, hammers banging nails, drills boring holes—filled the air. It was pure symphony to my ears.

Robert and one of the workmen pulled up a piece of plywood across the floor of the small room. Below us was the massive adobe end wall of the first floor. Nearly four feet wide, it spanned two joist bays.

“Can you fix it?” Robert asked, pointing at a huge hole in the adobe block apparently knocked out years ago when the room was a utility room. Kneeling down over the hole, I could see it was about three feet deep, measuring about

1½ feet across at the bottom and extending out around 4 feet across the top course. The width of the hole was about 16 inches.

I stood up, and we walked out onto the balcony. “Well, can you fix it? We’re on a tight schedule,” Robert asked. “Yes, yes, I’ll do it!” I yelled ecstatically. I am sure everyone on the second floor heard me.

Two days later, I was in the hole, wringing wet with sweat and water from the buckets of mud. The first task was to square the existing block by hand with a chisel and hammer so that the new mud-mortared block would fit snugly. Power tools are never used on adobe because the vibrations from them will loosen the brick.

The size of the original brick, when Juan Bandini and his family lived here in the 1830s and ‘40s, was about 20-24 inches in length and 16-18 inches in width. Nini Minovi, the archaeological project leader, and several Soltek workers had salvaged some of the brick, but it was too soft to be reused as brick. That’s the beauty of adobe: It can always be recycled—in this case as mortar.

I rubbed my hand across a roughly textured, red-brown brick. One-hundred and sixty years ago someone tamped mud into a wooden mold. It had pieces of chopped up straw in it to help wick away moisture. I left it intact, unused—my connection to the building’s past, to an almost lost craft, to the man or woman who made that brick long ago.

